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ABSTRACT

The learning assistance center at a California university offers a carefully designed learning program for faculty and staff in the areas of reading, writing, and time management. The goal of the reading efficiency course is to improve reading speed without loss in comprehension. Tests are given throughout the course to monitor progress, and classroom drills include the SQ3R survey method, timed reading drills, and use of a reading machine. The writing courses are designed around the memos, letters, and reports that faculty and staff must deal with on their jobs. The goals of these writing courses are to convince the participants that they need not write in an inflated, bureaucratic style and to help them learn to break the writing process down into manageable parts. The final set of courses is a group of seminars on time management. These courses are designed to help participants identify the ways in which they are wasting their time and to provide them with concrete suggestions for improving their organizational and goal-setting abilities, both on and off the job. Topics covered include time tracking, setting priorities, dealing with procrastination, delegation of tasks, stress management, and assertiveness. The center is currently developing a technical writing course and an English as a second language course which will include speaking as well as writing. (HTH)

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LEARNING CENTER COURSES FOR FACULTY AND STAFF:

READING, WRITING, AND TIME MANAGEMENT

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The core of the Learning Assistance Center (LAC) at Stanford University, since its beginning in 1972, has always been its undergraduate program: courses in reading, writing, study skills, tutoring and peer counseling, and a staff of tutors ready to help undergraduates in difficult academic subjects. With the designing of the first reading course for faculty and staff in 1975, however, the Center has branched out to include some additional activities: a tutoring program for graduate students, writing courses for foreign graduate students, writing courses at the Law School and, perhaps most interesting of all, a carefully constructed program for faculty and staff which today includes fifteen different courses in four different subject areas: reading, writing, time management and English as a Second Language. The purpose of this paper is to describe these courses, their students and instructors, and the administrative arrangement under which the program operates.

I was personally responsible for developing the first LAC faculty/staff course, the course in Reading Efficiency. Using as a model the Reading Rate Improvement course I was teaching undergraduates, I designed an eight week class especially suited to the reading demands of faculty and staff. This course met twice a week for fifty minutes, enrolled twenty to twenty-five students, and I held office hours at noon and five o'clock to accomodate my new students who were busy working during the day. That course, with minor changes, is the one we offer today to Stanford faculty and staff.

The goal of the Reading Efficiency course is to improve reading speed without loss in comprehension. Students can expect to double their current rate of reading of average difficulty materials and to achieve proficiency in skimming and scanning techniques.

A key to successful reading is the development of flexibility of reading

speeds. After completion of the course in Reading Efficiency people will still need to read a poem or a budget statement slowly and carefully, but they will also have several faster rates to help them read and digest the masses of printed materials we all find in front of us each day both at work and at home. The point is that no one should have only one reading speed.

Consistent, regular practice, both in class and at home, is essential to achieving the course goal of doubling reading speed without loss in comprehension. Therefore, students are expected not to miss class more than twice (and to make up any missed classes) and to keep a "Reading Drills Log" in which they record the required minimum of three half-hour homework practice sessions each week. Texts for the class include Baldridge's Seven Reading Strategies, Martha Maxwell's Skimming and Scanning Improvement, Judith Larsen's Guide to Rapid Reading and two easy novels of the student's own choice in which to begin to practice the new reading drills introduced in class.

The course begins with reading tests--two one thousand word passages followed by ten comprehension questions taken from Alton Raygor's Reading at Efficient Rates--to determine a student's current reading speed and comprehension. No reading speed score with a corresponding comprehension score below 80% is acceptable. Tests are given throughout the course, particularly at the midpoint and at the end, to monitor the progress a student is making in improving his or her reading efficiency. Classroom drills include the survey question step of SQ3R, rapid perception drills (where students work against time to identify a word or phrase in a series of words or phrases), the nine passage drill (where students read passages of equal length and difficulty in increasingly less time), speed in getting the point (where students work against time crossing out the absurd phrases in paragraphs), timed reading drills (where students skim/read pages in five, ten, fifteen, twenty and thirty seconds each, using their fingers as pacers), a reading machine which flashes lines of print

on the wall in rapid succession, and phrase reading (where students learn to read clusters of words rather than one word at a time). Students in the course are expected to come regularly to the LAC lab to use the reading machines and to practice classroom drills at home at least three times a week. The course ends with a final test--which nearly always shows that students have doubled or tripled their reading speeds while maintaining 80% or better comprehension--and suggestions to students for maintaining the gains they have made in class. Because it achieves its goals this course in very satisfying both to the instructors who teach it and to the faculty and staff who take it.

The second set of courses the Learning Assistance Center has developed for faculty and staff is a set of writing courses. Like the reading course, the writing courses are designed around materials faculty and staff have to deal with every day on their jobs--in this case, memos, reports, letters. In response to demand from faculty and staff, the original program expanded last year into writing courses on two levels, basic and advanced. The first, which will be given four times in 1981-82, is titled "Effective Writing on the Job: Letters, Memos, Minutes," and the second, which will be given twice, is called "Effective Writing for Managers: Proposals, Reports, Articles, Manuals." The first course, aimed primarily at secretaries, stresses the kinds of shorter letters and memos that support staff are often called upon to write. It includes a class on effective minutes and a review of the basics of punctuation. The second course, which is designed for administrators, overlaps the first in its general goals, its suggestions for editing techniques, and its tips for memo and letter writing, but it omits the work on punctuation and contains units on working through larger projects such as major reports or articles.

Like most faculty/staff courses, these writing courses will meet at noon next year. Both will follow the same format: eight class meetings and five individual half-hour conferences per student in which the instructor works

directly with the student on the memos, letters or reports he or she is currently writing. Instructors rely primarily on their own materials in teaching the class but most also use John Trimble's Writing With Style. Classes last for eight weeks and enrollment in each one is limited to fifteen students.

Arthur Hall, who has had primary responsibility for the faculty/staff writing courses for the past two years, states his goals for the courses as follows: to convince class participants that working at Stanford does not mean they have to write in an inflated, bureaucratic style; to help people learn to break the writing process down into manageable parts (brainstorming, planning, drafting, editing); to review punctuation and show how it can be used as a tool to aid meaning; to help class members with organization (basically a process of grouping related items under an appropriate heading) and to show how organization can be approached either inductively (you jot down your points and find a meaningful way of putting them together) or deductively (you start with an organizational framework and then fill in the details under headings); to show class participants that they are not alone in fearing or disliking writing--and to convince them that there are things they can do to make it easier on themselves; to increase the writer's sense of audience (so many things fall into place once you consider whom you're writing for, what they'll need to know, what their preconceived notions and feelings about a topic are likely to be); to give students strategies to combat the natural tendency to procrastinate on a writing task (scheduling, planning, breaking the job into small parts, rewarding themselves when they accomplish sections); to give class members specific editing techniques (converting passive constructions to the active voice whenever possible, cutting down on nouns and strengthening verbs, changing abstractions to concrete, imaginable examples, axing unnecessary words); to show students a few useful grammatical constructions (especially subordination) as a means of smoothing out their sentences and showing effectively the relationships

among their ideas; to help people eliminate common sentence structure problems (especially parallelism errors and dangling modifiers); and, above all, to get class members to consider writing as a form of human relations--to get them to practice the Golden Rule: "Write unto others as you would have them write unto you." Arthur emphasizes that he stresses the humanness of writing, that it is basically one person talking to another. To this end, he encourages class participants to use "I," "we," and "you" instead of third-person circumlocutions or abstractions. He hopes that in most situations his students will learn to write more as they would talk to a friend over a cup of coffee.

The individual conferences in the writing classes vary a great deal from student to student and even from session to session with the same teacher and the same student. But, in addition to reinforcing the general goals of the courses, during conferences writing instructors generally seek to accomplish four tasks. First, they try to help class members develop a healthy attitude toward their writing, to help them see it as something they are working on rather than as an extension of their egos. Second, they try to help students relax and develop a sense of confidence in their own work. Third, they try to get students to develop an "ear" for how their writing sounds. Most instructors have students read aloud in conference and comment on how their writing sounds to them. And, fourth, writing instructors try to develop a feeling of self-reliance in their students. Before giving suggestions for revisions, for example, instructors often hold back a few minutes, giving students a chance to think through a valid means of revision themselves.

After six quarters of working on the writing problems of faculty and staff, Arthur Hall believes that if these writers will trust their own instincts they will probably write well. "The major problem with writing among the people I have worked with here at Stanford," says Arthur, "is that they feel intimidated by the fact that their work will be read by academicians and therefore feel they

must write in as sophisticated a style as they can, instead of concentrating simply on getting their meaning across as directly and effectively as possible."

Participants have responded enthusiastically to the LAC's writing courses for faculty and staff, some calling them the best staff development courses they have taken, and many calling for more sections and more variety in types of writing instruction. In response, in addition to the advanced course for managers outlined above, we have developed a technical writing course for people who work at the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center, and we are in the process of designing a course for people whose first language is not English. I cannot speak of either of these courses in much detail because the technical writing course is being given for the first time right now, and the ESL course, which will probably include some instruction in speaking as well as in writing, is still on the drawing boards. We expect to offer it for the first time next fall and to repeat it again next spring.

The final set of courses the Learning Assistance Center has developed for faculty and staff at Stanford is a group of seminars on Time Management. The seminar description in the current brochure which lists all staff development courses at Stanford reads, "Is a day simply not long enough? This workshop helps participants discover where their time goes, set up a schedule and establish priorities, and become more effective at accomplishing what they decide to do. The class meets four times (one hour a week), and the instructor meets with each participant for three individual half-hour sessions." Enrollment in each seminar is limited to twenty and the LAC will give seminars next year in the fall, winter and spring quarters.

According to Susan Wyle, the instructor for the Time Management seminars, this course is designed to help participants identify the ways in which they are wasting their time and to provide them with concrete suggestions for improving their organizational and goal-setting abilities. In order to be effective,

the class is geared towards problems both on and off the job. The majority of people who enroll in the Time Management seminars are women and most of these women have families and/or are in school as well as working. Their wish is to be as effective as possible both at work and at home. With these facts in mind, Susan has developed the Time Management course to include identification of both short- and long-term goals. This seems to be a particularly popular part of the class, because many of the women complain of vague feelings of dissatisfaction, but have not been able to isolate how they are wasting their time, or what exactly they wish to do. Once they have identified their short- and long-term goals, students in the class focus on isolating a specific task, breaking it down into manageable parts, and scheduling it into a given day or week.

The Time Management seminar meets once a week for four consecutive weeks. This format works well because class members have a month-long period in which to try out various suggestions and to discuss the results in class. Group participation is encouraged bacause class members often come up with helpful suggestions for each other. In fact, at the end of the fourth session the instructor asks each participant to be a time management counselor for a partner. This technique seems to promote creative problem solving; in discovering they can come up with solutions for others, participants realize they have the ability to solve their own problems.

Topics covered in class include time tracking; creative scheduling; setting A, B and C priorities; identifying high and low energy periods; setting short- and long-term goals; dealing with common time wasters (telephone, meetings, socializing, paper); forming new habits (rewards and punishments, overcoming fear, self-contracts); dealing with procrastination; self-observation and evaluation; time savers (effective writing, flexible reading including methods of scanning and skimming, using waiting time, the art of listening); delegation

of tasks; stress management (breathing for relaxation, deep muscle relaxation, instant relaxation drills); special problems at work (managing your boss, working with subordinates, assertive versus aggressive behavior); time management at home (identifying problem areas, work space, filing systems); and review and evaluation of progress. The three suggested readings are: How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life by Alan Lakein, The Time Trap by R. Alan Mackenzie and Getting Organized by Stephanie Winston.

Each person enrolled in the Time Management seminar has three individual conferences with the instructor. These conferences are a vital part of the success of the program. Class members bring to their conferences a time tracking sheet on which they have recorded a day's or a week's activities. From this record student and instructor can look at problems and discuss possible solutions. Susan says she finds that most class members actually need just a little advice, but a lot of encouragement. And that an outside view seems to help them considerably.

In response to requests from a number of University employees who have enrolled in our Time Mangement seminars we plan to institute a series of review classes next year. These would be forums in which basic ideas could be reviewed and new problems aired. We plan to offer a two hour review session several times next year to participants who have taken the Time Management seminar at some earlier time. Review course members would be asked to fill out a questionnaire ahead of time, stating the kinds of problems they are having and the kinds of matters they would like to discuss. The instructor would then go over some of these problems in class, as well as give new goal identification exercises and review the basic concepts of time management.

In describing LAC courses for faculty and staff in this paper I have referred in passing to both the students who enroll in these courses and the instructors who teach them. I would like to pause here, however, and speak directly about

these two groups. As might be expected, more staff than faculty enroll in these staff development courses (although I have vivid memories of a Law School professor in one of my first Reading Efficiency classes), more lower level than senior level staff, and more women than men. Some possible explanations come readily to mind. All these classes are advertised primarily through the brochure describing University sponsored classes for staff--not faculty--development; there are more lower level than senior level staff at Stanford; and most of Stanford's office workers are women.

Next year we will have more instructors than ever before teaching in the LAC's faculty/staff program: five. I think the best way to describe the teaching staff is to say a few words about some of us who have taught these courses in the past. Arthur Hall graduated Phi Beta Kappa in English from the University of California at Berkeley and earned an M.A. in English Literature and the teaching of writing at San Francisco State University. He has had extensive teaching experience at both the college and community college level and has just completed a textbook on writing. Susan Wyle earned both a B.A. and an M.A. in English from Stanford University, has served as an editor and writer of educational materials and is an author of children's books. Both are enrolling this year in doctoral programs at Stanford. Bernie Rihn and I were classmates some years ago in Stanford's doctoral program in English Education and we are currently working together on a book on reading. We have both authored articles and delivered papers on reading, writing, and study skills, and we have both taught extensively at the college and the pre-college level. Between us, we have taught all the LAC courses, many of them often. David Elias, who is presently completing a doctoral program at Stanford, has taught at both the two and four year college level and has taught writing to foreign graduate students here at the LAC for the past two years. Patrick Von Bargen, who has taught study skills and coordinated the tutoring program at the LAC for the past two years, graduated Phi

Beta Kappa in history from Stanford, then went to Law School at Stanford and to the Yale School of Organization and Management.

Administratively, how does all this work? As I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the core of the Learning Assistance Center at Stanford is its undergraduate program, and I, as Director of the Center, report to the Dean of Undergraduate Studies. To provide for supervision of the Center's faculty/staff program I receive 10% released time and Personnel, that branch of the University which sponsors courses for staff development, compensates Undergraduate Studies for this time. Under this arrangement I am responsible for assessing faculty/staff training needs in reading, writing, time management and English as a Second Language, for the development and presentation of courses, and for the administration of the program. This includes finding, hiring and training teachers, supervising their performance, preparing the budget, and coordinating LAC activities with the Staff Development section of Personnel. Personnel compensates directly all the instructors in the program; they are paid as private consultants.

It has been my hope in writing this paper to outline a way that Learning Assistance Centers can reach out beyond their student populations to serve a wider audience, the University's own employees--its faculty and staff. Perhaps some of you, my colleagues at college Learning Centers nationally, will find you wish to expand your activities in this area and will find these suggestions helpful.

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